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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP:AMACDONALD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: AGREEMENT TO DELAY ELECTIONS UP TO TWO YEARS
REPORTEDLY REACHED

REF: SANAA 324

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Shoura Council member Mohamed al-Tayyeb told the DCM on February 24 that a definitive agreement had been reached between the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) to delay the Parliamentary elections scheduled for April 27 for two years.

Hassan Zaid, Secretary General of JMP member party al-Haq, reported the same news to PolOff on February 24. Frustrated and irritated National Democratic Institute (NDI) Country Director Heather Therrien told POL/E Chief that Sultan Barkani, head of the GPC Parliamentary bloc, confirmed the news to her on the same day. Therrien, whose organization has been acting as a go-between for the two parties, was exasperated at the length of the reported delay. "This is nothing like what we have been discussing," she said.

12. (C) Deputy Secretary General of JMP member party Islah Mohammed al-Saadi confirmed the one-to-two year delay and clarified why the time period was so much longer than had been anticipated. The agreement includes not just an electoral delay but also the reformation of the Supreme Council for Elections and Referenda (SCER), amendments to the electoral law and undertaking constitutional reform, he told POL/E Chief. Although he did not specify which constitutional reforms were to be undertaken, the only issue currently under discussion that would need constitutional reform is replacing the current "first past the post" system with a proportional list system. This is a marked deviation for the principles of agreement (reftel) heretofore under consideration, which had specified that such discussions would take place after the elections. Additionally, the fact that the delay is being openly touted by GPC officials is a departure from their previous reticence. As Therrien pointed out on February 24, "this directly contradicts Saleh's position. He said he (and by extension the GPC) would not ask for a delay but would only accept one that was proposed by a third agency (such as the SCER)."

13. (C) A delay of this length is a significant concession to the JMP and will work to its advantage. As Zaid told PolOff, "When a student has not done his homework, he welcomes a long delay of the exam." The delay will not only give the JMP the time it needs to push for reforms, but also allow it to do the campaigning and organizational groundwork it has neglected during the boycott. In spite of the fact that the agreement would appear to be a significant victory for his party and the opposition in general, Saadi was cautious when discussing it with Pol/E Chief. "Nothing is agreed until it is signed," he told POL/E Chief. "They have agreed in (spoken) words, but they still have to write it down and then they have to sign it."

14. (C) Comment. This agreement, if carried out, stands to drastically change the landscape of the Parliamentary

elections. Beyond the delay itself, changing to a proportional list voting system will require not only changing Yemen's constitution but re-educating its voters and retooling its electoral infrastructure. In any case, the agreement is unlikely to be signed before President Saleh returns next week from his trip to Syria and Russia.

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